

# *Documents on Diplomacy: The Source*

## *Our First Impressions are Extremely Favorable*

*A Telegram from Ambassador Gauss in China forwarding Report No. 1 from John Service  
with the Chinese Communists, August 26, 1944*

SIR: I have the honor to refer to my despatch No. 2905, August 25, 1944, enclosing a copy of a report from the U. S. Army Observer Section at Yen-an, Shensi (seat of the Chinese Communist regime), describing the trip of the Section to Yen-an and its reception and preliminary activities there, and to enclose a copy of a further report (No. 1) *First Informal Impressions of the North Shensi Communist Base*, dated July 28, 1944. The enclosed report was prepared by Mr. John S. Service, Second Secretary on detail at General Stilwell's Headquarters, who is a member of the Observer Section. The purpose of the enclosed report, as stated in the first paragraph thereof, is to record a few initial impressions of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Area—an area on which we have had few first-hand reports in recent years. After a six-day survey of the Yen-an scene, Mr. Service observes that the people, spirit and atmosphere of Yen-an are different (in a superior sense) from those to be found in Kuomintang-governed China. He finds an absence of formality and ostentation in Yen-an; life is simple and morale high. He finds that there are a large number of young people who are industrious and serious in their work. A spirit of industry pervades Yen-an, Mr. Service finds, but a good deal of time is devoted to talk, discussion and meetings. Mr. Service asserts that there is an emphasis on democracy and intimate relations with the common people, and a surprising political consciousness. He observes that there is an air of calm confidence, no tension or feeling of restraint or suppression, and he concludes that a well-integrated movement and program are being carried out successfully under competent leaders. In short, Mr. Service's first impressions of the Yen-an scene seem to have been wholly favorable.

Respectfully yours,

C. E. GAUSS

[Enclosure]

### REPORT BY THE SECOND SECRETARY OF EMBASSY IN CHINA (SERVICE) NO. 1

[YENAN,] July 28, 1944.

**Subject:** First Informal Impressions of the North Shensi Communist Base.

**To:** Commanding General, Fwd. Ech., USAF-CBI, APO 879.

Although I have been in Yen-an only 6 days, it seems advisable, in view of the availability of mail facilities and their future uncertainty, to try to record a few general first impressions of the Communist Border Region.

In spite of the shortness of the time we have been here, I have had opportunities to meet and talk to a number of Chinese friends, to meet three foreigners who have been resident in the Communist area for some time, and to meet most of the important Communist leaders. In addition I have had the chance to draw on the experience, impressions, and notebooks of several foreign correspondents who have spent more than 6 weeks in Yen-an, during which time they have been given every sort of facility to interview personages and collect information.

My own experience is that one enters an area like this, concerning which one has heard so many entirely good but second-hand reports, with a conscious determination not to be swept off one's feet. The feeling is that things cannot possibly be as good as they have been pictured, and that there must be a "catch" somewhere. It is interesting, therefore, that my own first impressions—and those of the rest of our Observer Group—have been extremely favorable. The same is true of the foreign correspondents, at least two of whom (Votaw and Forman) could not, by any stretching of the term, have been called "pro-Communist" before their arrival. The spell of the Chinese Communists still seems to work.

All of our party have had the same feeling—that we have come into a different country and are meeting a different people. There is undeniably a change in the spirit and atmosphere. As one officer,

born and brought up in China, put it: "I find myself continually trying to find out just how Chinese these people are."

This difference in atmosphere is evident in many ways.

There is an absence of show and formality, both in speech and action. Relations of the officials and people toward us, and of the Chinese among themselves, are open, direct and friendly. Mao Tse-tung and other leaders are universally spoken of with respect (amounting in the case of Mao to a sort of veneration) but these men are approachable and subservience toward them is completely lacking. They mingle freely in groups.

Bodyguards, gendarmes and the clap-trap of Chungking officialdom are also completely lacking. To the casual eye there are no police in Yen-an. And very few soldiers are seen.

There are also no beggars, nor signs of desperate poverty.

Clothing and living are very simple. Almost everyone except the peasants wear the same plain Chungshan type uniform of native cotton cloth. We have seen no signs of ostentation in dress, living, or entertaining.

Women not only wear practically the same clothes (trousers, sandals or cloth shoes, and often a Russian type smock), they act and are treated as friendly equals. Their openness and complete lack of self-consciousness is at first almost disconcerting. This does not mean familiarity: the spooning couples seen in parks or quiet streets in Chungking would seem as out of place as long gowns, high heels or lipstick.

There are a great number of young people, both men and women. This is natural with the universities and various Party training schools. But there is generally an air of maturity and seriousness about these students. They have little time, one learns, for loitering and they have most of them earned their higher training by hard work, generally for the Party. Those who are here are here because they want to be, and they expect work and a very simple life.

These students from all over China, many from the forward bases in the guerrilla zones, and the fact that one meets Government and military officials from all over North China, gives the feeling that this is sort of nerve center of important happenings. Students continually talk of going back to the villages or the front to carry on their work.

Morale is very high. The war seems close and real. There is no defeatism, but rather confidence. There is no war-weariness.

One gets a feeling that everyone has a job. The program to make every person a producer has a real meaning. Those who do not

grow crops, work at something like spinning. Each morning we see our co-ed neighbors at the university at their spinning wheels outside their caves.

At the same time there is time for a great deal of talk and discussion. There are continual meetings.

This leisure is notable in the case of the Party leaders. One learns that they stay completely out of the Government and hold no routine tasks of this time consuming character.

People do not talk of going "back to Shanghai" as soon as the war is over. People have made themselves at home here.

Toward the rest of China, the attitude is one of interest in conditions there but a sort of detached sympathy because they know that conditions there are so much worse than here.

There is everywhere an emphasis on democracy and intimate relations with the common people. This is shown in their cultural work which is taken very seriously. Drama and music have taken over the native folk forms of the country people of this area. Social dancing includes dancing of the local folk dance.

People are serious and tend to have a sense of a mission. But recreation is encouraged. One form of this, just mentioned, is social dancing. At the dinner given for us after our arrival, all the most important leaders joined in the dancing in the most natural and democratic manner.

There is a surprising political consciousness. No matter who one questions—barber or farmer or room attendant—he can give a good description of the Communist program for carrying on the war. We notice that most of the coolies waiting on us read the newspaper.

There is no tension in the local situation—no guards when one enters the city, no garrisoned blockhouses on the hills (as were so apparent in Lanchow in 1943). One hears nothing of banditry or disturbances in the country.

We saw a group of men marching down the road with no armed escort in sight. We were told they were new recruits.

There is no criticism of Party leaders and no political talk.

At the same time there is no feeling of restraint or suppression. Foreigners notice this particularly after they have traveled in Kuomintang North China. We are not burdened with people trying to question us under the guise of making friends. Our interpreters are available when we want them. No one bothers to lock their rooms. We walk freely where we wish. The correspondents have had no censorship.

The leaders make excellent personal impressions. The military men look and act like capable military men. Mao has more warmth and magnetism than would be expected from the generally poor pictures of him.

The general feeling is of calm self-confidence-self-respect. General Yeh laughed about the weapons of the Communist armies. "But," Yeh said, "I won't apologize. It was all we had, and we fought with them." Things happen pretty well in a business-like way.

To the skeptical, the general atmosphere in Yen-an can be compared to that of a rather small, sectarian college-or a religious summer conference. There is a bit of the smugness, self-righteousness, and conscious fellowship.

I had a little bit of this feeling during the first few days. Later I found myself agreeing with one of the correspondents, a man who has been long in China, when he said: "We have come to the mountains of North Shensi, to find the most modern place in China."

I think now that further study and observation will confirm that what is seen at Yen-an is a well integrated movement, with a political and economic program, which it is successfully carrying out under competent leaders.

And that while the Kuomintang has lost its early revolutionary character and with that loss disintegrated, the Communist Party, because of the struggle it has had to continue, has kept its revolutionary character, but has grown to a healthy and moderate maturity.

One cannot help coming to feel that this movement is strong and successful, and that it has such drive behind it and has tied itself so closely to the people that it will not easily be killed.

**JOHN S. SERVICE**

No. 2906

*Source*

United States Department of State, *United States Department of State/ Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, China, 1944*, pp. 516-520

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